*The Prophetic Office connected with Poetry and Music.*

12.

A

# SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

## *Cathedral Church of Worcester,*

SEPTEMBER 30, 1800,

AT THE

## *ANNUAL MEETING*

OF THE

## THREE CHOIRS

OF

## *Worcester, Hereford, and Glocester.*

BY THOMAS JAMES, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF WORCESTER.

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1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE STEWARDS

*OF THE MUSIC-MEETING*

OF THE THREE CHOIRS OF

**Worcester, Hereford, and Glocester,**

*For the Relief of the Widows and Orphans of the Poor Clergy of the Three Dioceſes:*

TO THE NOBILITY:

TO THE MEMBERS

FOR THE COUNTY AND CITY, AND BOROUGHS IN THE COUNTY OF WORCESTER:

AND

TO THE CLERGY AND GENTRY,

Preſent at the Meeting:

Who, by the liberality of their Contributions, have abundantly ſupported the humane and Chriſtian ends of this Inſtitution; and, by their very numerous and reſpectable appearance, have manifeſted a general Diſpoſition in the County, to regard it as the means of promoting provincial harmony and union;

THIS DISCOURSE,

Publiſhed at their Requeſt,

And for the Benefit of this Charity,

Is, with all reſpect, inſcribed by

Their moſt obedient Servant,

THOMAS JAMES.

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE CONNECTED WITH POETRY AND MUSIC.

# A SERMON, &c.

2 Kings, chap. iii. part of v. 14 and 15.

*And Elisha said,—But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.*

IF any teſtimony were wanting of the important uſe of muſic in religious acts and offices, the text before us would afford a powerful and deciſive argument in its favour. Behold here Eliſha, a man of God, and endued even "*with a double portion of* "*the ſpirit of Elijah*," (*a*) calling for a minſtrel or muſician to play before him, juſt as he is about to propheſy! Behold, moreover, the effect! "*when the minstrel played,*



(*a*) 2 Kings, ii. 9.

" *the hand of the Lord came upon him.*" Obſerve next the ſolemn circumſtances of the ſcene. In the preſence of Eliſha were three Kings regarding him as the oracle of Heaven; the Kings of Iſrael, Judah and Edom; whoſe confederate armies were ready to periſh for want of water in a waſte and ſandy deſert. At the ſight of the King of Iſrael, who, like his fathers, had promoted idolatry among his ſubjects, to withdraw them from going up to Jeruſalem, leſt by joining in the eſtabliſhed worſhip of the Temple they ſhould mix familiarly with the ſiſter-kingdom of Judah, unite again with it, and revolt from the royal houſe of Iſrael; at the ſight of ſuch a prince, who had ſacrificed true religion to his worldly intereſts, who had forſaken God in proſperity, and now ſought him only in adverſity, the prophet exclaims with indignation, " *what have I to do with thee? get thee to the* " *prophets of thy father and to the prophets of* " *thy mother*;" (*b*) that is, to thoſe falſe prophets of Baal, whom thy mother Jezebel perſuaded thy father to eſtabliſh, and to perſecute all the prophets of God. " *And the* " *King of Israel said unto him, nay, for the* " *Lord*

(*b*) 2 Kings, iii. 13.

" *Lord hath called theſe three Kings together*
" *to deliver them into the hand of Moab*;" (*c*)
that is, nay, I will not conſult them, my father's prophets; for this event is from the Lord, who hath not only called me, but theſe two other Kings of Judah and Edom, innocent of the crimes of my family, to deliver them into the hands of their enemies. In reply Eliſha ſolemnly intimates, that not for his ſake, but from a regard to the King of Judah, a worſhipper in ſpirit and in truth, he would proceed to inquire of the Lord. " *As the Lord liveth* (*d*) (ſays Eliſha) *before whom I ſtand, ſurely were it*
" *not that I regard the preſence of Jehoſaphat*
" *King of Judah, I would not look toward*
" *thee nor ſee thee. But now bring me a*
" *minſtrel. And it came to paſs, when the*
" *minſtrel played, that the hand of the Lord*
" *came upon him.*"

That the Prophet had ſome good end in view, when he called for the minſtrel, cannot be queſtioned: the only queſtion is, what was that particular end? To inveſtigate this, we muſt conſider, firſt, the religious exerciſes of the age in which Eliſha lived,

(*c*) 2 Kings, iii. 13. (*d*) 2 Kings, iii. 14, 15.

lived, and ſecondly, the form and ſtyle of the prophecy delivered on this occaſion.

Firſt then, the religious exerciſes of the age in which Eliſha lived, were not without the powerful aſſiſtance which poetry and muſic were able to afford them in ſeminaries partly inſtituted for that purpoſe. It is well known, that even from the earlieſt times of the Hebrew commonwealth, there were ſchools or colleges, the members of which were called "*the ſons of the prophets,*" (*e*) and ſometimes "*prophets.*"(*f*) I call them ſchools, becauſe they had a common teacher; for, when Saul, without any previous inſtruction (and in reality by divine inſpiration) was doing the office of a prophet, a by-ſtander, being aſtoniſhed that one who had not been taught and educated for the purpoſe, ſhould be able to diſcharge ſo ſolemn a duty, exclaims, "*is Saul alſo among "the prophets? but who is their father?*" (*g*) that is, who is the maſter and teacher of theſe? for ſo the Chaldee paraphraſt renders it; and in this interpretation both the Jewiſh and Chriſtian commentators agree. I call them

(*e*) 2 Kings, vi. 1, &c.
(*f*) 1 Sam. x. 11.—1 Kings, xviii. 4, &c. &c.
(*g*) 1 Sam. x. 11, 12.

them colleges, becauſe from ſacred hiſtory it appears, that they ate (*h*) together, abode (*i*) together, and performed their religious duties, as a body, (*k*) together. Over all theſe ſeminaries preſided ſome prophet of ſuperior authority; ſome one, upon whom the Spirit of God reſted in thoſe days. Thus we find Samuel preſiding over them: (*l*) and when Elijah was taken up into heaven, "*the ſons of the prophets ſaid, The "Spirit of Elijah doth reſt on Eliſha. And "they came to meet him, and bowed themſelves "to the ground before him*;" (*m*) in token, no doubt, that they acknowledged him as exerciſing a paramount and ſuperior authority; for we find whole colleges, or (to ſpeak ſcripturally) whole *companies* (*n*) of them afterwards ſubmitting to his advice and direction, particularly, in enlarging their places of abode, (*o*) and in procuring a ſupply of proviſions at a time of famine. (*p*) Though Scripture affords but little information concerning the inſtitutes and diſcipline of this *goodly fellowſhip of the prophets*,

(*h*) 2 Kings, iv. 38, 43. (*i*) 2 Kings, vi. 1.
(*k*) 1 Sam. x. 5—and xix. 20. (*l*) 1 Sam. xix. 20.
(*m*) 2 Kings, ii. 15. (*n*) 1 Sam. x. 5—and xix. 20.
(*o*) 2 Kings, vi. 1. (*p*) 2 Kings, iv. 38.

*phets*,(*) we nevertheleſs underſtand, that, together with the ſtudy of the Moſaic law and other ſacred purſuits, one part of their occupation conſiſted in writing and ſinging the praiſes of God in hymns and poetic ſtrains, accompanied by ſtringed inſtruments and pipes. (*q*) This ſinging of holy ſongs to various ſorts of muſic is, on ſome occaſions, called, in Scripture, "*prophesying*," (*r*) in alluſion to thoſe religious exerciſes, both vocal and inſtrumental, in uſe among the prophets: and hence David's chief muſicians in the Temple are ſaid to have "*propheſied upon the harp, the pſaltery, and* "*the cymbal.*" (*s*) In conformity to this, "Miriam, the ſiſter (*t*) of Aaron, (*v*) and Deborah" (*u*) are ſtiled "*prophetesses*," not only becauſe they pronounced the oracles of

(*) See the *Te Deum* in the Liturgy.

(*q*) 1 Sam. x. 5—10.—1 Sam. xix. 20—24.

(*r*) The word *propheſy* is uſed in Scripture in three different ways. Firſt, it ſignifies to foretel future events by divine inſpiration: ſecondly, to explain the Scriptures, but eſpecially the prophets, in a known and intelligible language, as in 1 Cor. xiv. 1—6:—thirdly, to ſing praiſes and thankſgivings to God, as the companies of the prophets did, to the ſounds of various inſtruments.

(*s*) 1 Chron. xxv. 1. 3.—ſee alſo Numb. xi. 25.

(*t*) Numb. xxvi. 59. (*v*) Exod. xv. 20.

(*u*) Judges, iv. 4. and c. 5.

of Jehovah, but on account of their excellence in muſic and poetry. (*w*)

From theſe, and other teſtimonies that might be adduced, it is ſufficiently evident, that the prophetic office had a ſtrict connection with poetry and muſic; (*x*) and that theſe ſiſter arts were united by the Hebrews, as well as by all other nations, even in the firſt ſtages of ſociety. The Holy Spirit diſdained not to aid the pious labours of men who employed the harmony either of words or ſounds to the advancement of religious and moral duties; for, whenever God was pleaſed to ſend any prophets as extraordinary meſſengers to his choſen people, and to inſpire them with the knowledge of future events, he generally took them out of theſe ſchools from among the ſons of the prophets; whence Amos, ſpeaking of the commiſſion he had received from the Lord to propheſy unto the people of Iſrael, takes particular notice of this as an unuſual circumſtance, that when he was called, he "*was no prophet neither a prophet's son.*" (*y*) The education of thoſe perſons was, no doubt,

(*w*) Lowth, De Sacrâ Poeſi Hebræorum. Præl. xviii.
(*x*) Lowth, ibidem.
(*y*) Amos, vii. 14, 15.

doubt, from its very nature, peculiarly adapted to the miniſterial function; for from Scripture it appears, that they lived together in companies, (*z*) and in ſeveral different places; (*aa*) that they were reſorted to by the people for inſtruction on holy days; (*bb*) and that they celebrated the Deity, ſometimes under the peculiar impulſe of the Holy Spirit, in muſic and in ſong. (*cc*) The prophet Habakkuk indiſputably teſtifies, that a part, at leaſt, of his writings, were intended for muſical accompaniments; for at the end of his prayer, or rather beautiful ode, which abounds with poetical imagery, he ſubjoins the following expreſs direction. "*To the chief ſinger on* "*my ſtringed inſtruments.*" (*dd*)

What was the nature of theſe ſacred hymns, what their metrical form, and poetic harmony, how they ſometimes threatened ſinners, ſometimes exhorted to repentance, ſometimes recorded extraordinary providential deliverances, may be ſufficiently

(*z*) 2 Kings, vi. 1.—2 Kings, iv. 38, 43.

(*aa*) 1 Sam. x. 5, 10—1 Sam. xix. 18, 19, 20—2 Kings, ii. 3—2 Kings, ii. 5—2 Kings, iv. 38.

(*bb*) 2 Kings, iv. 23. (*cc*) 1 Sam. x. 10, &c.

(*dd*) Hab. iii. 19.

ently collected from the writings of the prophets who iſſued from theſe ſchools, from the whole book of Pſalms, and various ſongs of thankſgiving, both in the Pentateuch and in other hiſtorical parts of the Bible. In all theſe (as well as in Job and Lamentations) the compoſition is uncommonly artificial in its flow and cadence, having the entire form and feature of enraptured poetry, while the harmony of the ſentences is ſo melodious, as to be diſcoverable, even through the medium of a tranſlation, by the rudeſt ear. The ſentiments that breathe, the words that burn, correſpond altogether with the deſign and inſtitution of the ſeminaries to which the prophets belonged; and are at the ſame time an inconteſtable proof of the eminent qualification of their members to advance religious worſhip, and to communicate the revelations of God.

That muſic was particularly applicable to all the Sacred Writings I have mentioned, is evident from thoſe traces of metrical harmony which are plainly diſcoverable throughout them; that muſical inſtruments actually accompanied the public

rehearſal of certain parts of them, is expreſsly declared in Scripture; (*ee*) and that Eliſha, on the occaſion before us, delivered his prophecy in numbers correſponding with, or accommodated to, poetic meaſure, and, according to the Chaldee interpretation of the word "Minſtrel" in my text, *to the ſound of one playing on the harp*, is highly probable. This was the ordinary practice of the "companies of the prophets;" and the form and ſtyle of this prophecy (which was to be my ſecond conſideration) being poetical, is altogether in conformity with that religious practice. The Holy Spirit that had before enraptured the mind, and animated the imagination of Noah, (*ff*) of Jacob, (*gg*) and of Balaam, (*hh*) to predict futurities in the ſtrong language of poetry, now alſo dictated its effuſions in a like harmonious flow. In the four verſes that follow my text, the Prophet directs the three confederate armies, almoſt periſhing through drought, to dig the valley they were

(*ee*) Exod. xv. 20, 21.—1 Chron. xvi. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, &c.—2 Chron. v. 12, 13, and vii. 6.—Ezra, iii. 11.—Iſai. xxxviii. 20.—Pſalms, xxxiii. 2, 3, and lvii. 8, 9, with various paſſages of the ſame import in other Pſalms.

(*ff*) Gen. ix. 25, 26, 27. (*gg*) Gen. xlix.

(*hh*) Numb. xxiv.

were in full of ditches, which ſhould be marvellouſly filled with water without the ordinary and viſible cauſes, wind and rain; and, after this relief, he aſſures them of a complete victory over their enemies the Moabites, whoſe cities they ſhould overthrow, whoſe fruit-trees they ſhould fell, whoſe wells they ſhould ſtop up, and mar or ruin all cultivation among them by ſcattering ſtones over the ſurface of their fields. But hear the prophecy itſelf, and obſerve how the nature of poetry predominates even in our Engliſh tranſlation, with little elſe than the addition of one word, and the ſlighteſt tranſpoſition of ſome others. (*ii*)

Make this valley full of ditches: for thus ſaith the Lord;
Ye ſhall not ſee wind, nor ſhall ye ſee rain;
Yet that valley ſhall with water be filled,
That ye may drink, ye, your cattle and your beaſts.
And this thing is but light in the ſight of the Lord:
Moab alſo will HE deliver into your hand.
And every city that is fenced ſhall ye ſmite,
Even every choice city *around*.
And every good tree ſhall ye fell,
And the water in wells ſhall ye ſtop,
And every good piece of land mar with ſtones.

The

(*ii*) 2 Kings, iii. 16, 17, 18, 19.

The divine Word was fulfilled on the following day: and the memory of a deliverance, ſo providentially accompliſhed, was in no way more likely to live in all future ages, than by being recorded and handed down in the form of poetry; which might be occaſionally accompanied, according to the religious uſage of the country, by inſtrumental melody. And what expedient can be at any time more proper, what agency more powerful than that of muſic, to excite the affections and draw them under the dominion of reaſon? This is the great aim of magnificent temples, of ſolemn ſervices, of the inceſſant labours of the Miniſters of the Lord. Other arts ordinarily uſed as the ancillary and external recommendations of religion, Painting, for inſtance, and Sculpture, may have ſeduced the mind, and debaſed it even to idolatry; but Muſic has been the innocent, the faithful, the charming hand-maid of piety among all nations, and in all ages of the world. The power of melody, inſpired at firſt by the Creator with the breath of man, and aided afterwards by the inventions of Jubal, (*kk*) (the ſeventh from Adam) produced

(*kk*) Gen. iv. 21.

duced that vocal and inſtrumental union, which in general was, no doubt, adopted not only on occaſions of mirth, (*ll*) in the hours of gaiety and feſtivity, but in the more ſolemn offices of religion, and in the worſhip of God; and, therefore, was expreſsly ſo employed by Moſes, (*mm*) who communed with God, and by his ſiſter Miriam. The mighty effects of harmony may be conceived from its growing eſtimation; from the eſtabliſhment of various companies or ſchools of the prophets, for compoſing hymns as well as for rehearſing them to muſic; and by David's appointment of no leſs than four thouſand perſons (*nn*) to employ their inſtruments and voices within the courts of the Temple. Our Lord and his Apoſtles ſanctioned theſe melodious ſervices: they frequented the Temple: they partook of the worſhip: they ſung a hymn themſelves near the mount of Olives. (*oo*) Even the heavenly hoſt break forth into a hymn upon the birth of our Saviour: (*pp*) and the myſterious decrees of God are revealed in a viſion to St.

(*ll*) Gen. xxxi. 27. (*mm*) Exod. xv. 1, and verſe 20, 21.
(*nn*) 1 Chron. xxiii. 5. (*oo*) Matt. xxvi. 30.
(*pp*) Luke, ii. 13.

St. John with a ſymbolical repreſentation of celeſtial harmony. (*qq*)

If then muſic, inferior only to the charms with which reaſon can perſuade, holds the next and higheſt rank amongſt our ſpiritual pleaſures; if it wears not out the ſenſe it gratifies, like all other earthly delights; if it has ever been the companion of holy men and prophets highly favoured of heaven, what better external means ſhall we uſe to excite you to glorify God, and do good to man? Sanctify therefore the melody that is now in your hearts by chearful and liberal contributions to that great charity for the ſake of which we are here aſſembled, the relief of our widows and orphans in diſtreſs. The Scriptures recommend the caſe of all ſuch perſons to our particular regard; for one mark of "*pure religion* "*and undefiled before God and the Father* "*is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows* "*in their affliction.*" (*rr*) Even miracles have been wrought in their behalf. The weeping widow of Nain received her orphan, through our Saviour's benevolence, from

(*qq*) Rev. v. 8; and xiv. 2; and xv. 3.

(*rr*) James, i. 27.

from the bier into life again: (*ss*) and the widow of one of the ſons of the prophets, being commiſerated by the man of God in my text, ſaw her children releaſed from ſlavery, and all her wants ſupplied, by a multiplication of her veſſels of oil. (*tt*) What! though theſe were acts of heavenly power, and are no longer to be imitated by us upon earth; yet are we ſtill able to entertain the humane and compaſſionate principles from whence they proceeded. *Be ye, therefore, merciful, even as your Father* (*vv*) which is in heaven *is merciful;* and under the influence of this ſacred harmony in the houſe of God, be ready each one, according to his abilities, to become "*a father to the fatherleſs,* (*uu*) and to *cauſe* "*the widow's heart to ſing for joy.*" (*ww*)

(*ss*) Luke, vii. 11. (*tt*) 2 Kings, iv. 1.
(*vv*) Luke, vi. 36. (*uu*) Pſalm, lxviii. 5.
(*ww*) Job, xxix. 13.

FINIS.

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